

The History of Xim and the Tion Cluster

Introduction



By Jason Fry; illustrations by modi; Special thanks to Michael Kogge

The tales of Xim the Despot reach back so far in galactic memory that the lines between ancient chronicles and long-held myths have become too blurred to ever redraw. And as he has receded in history, Xim has come to mean quite different things to different species. To much of galactic society he is a savage figure but also a mythic one, the impact of his atrocities dulled by the passage of eons. To the Tionese, he is a melancholy symbol of vanished might and betrayal. To the Hutts, he is an example of humans' brutish power and Hutt vengeance. To those whose ancestors were his slaves, he is a story to spook children, but one hinting at a terrible truth: Space is full of horrors that could ruin everything one considers eternal and holds dear.

Recent decades have seen a renaissance in Xim scholarship. The New Republic has granted unprecedented access to Imperial archives, allowing the restoration of material thought erased in data purges. The reborn Jedi Council has shared historical records recovered from its secret storehouses. Species such as the Columi have released invaluable chronicles dating back eons. The end of the Empire and the diminution of Hutt power have allowed exploration of worlds long unreachable. And progressive entities within the Tion itself have cooperated with historical inquiries, hoping to shake off the ancient resentments and conspiracy theories that have kept their region a backwater.

This is not to say that the history of the Despot is now clear: Xim remains a divisive figure among historians, with respected scholars continuing to argue about the chronology of his rule, which deeds should properly be attributed to his father Xer, and whether or not the many tales of The Despotica, that epic work of drama, have a basis in historical reality. But whether one champions the theories of Bleys Harand, Sal Ransen, S.V. Skynx or other Xim scholars, this much is clear: Many of Xim's accomplishments are as awe-inspiring as the wildest tales of The Despotica. Xim's monstrous ambitions may have claimed much of what he built, but his name will endure as long as galactic civilization itself.

Before Xim: The Pirate-King of Argai

Most every child knows that Xim the Despot was the child of Xer VIII -- "Son of Xer!" remains a common expression of amazement in parts of the Outer Rim. But what Xer did to build the Tion into an empire has been largely obscured by his son's deeds.

Today the planet Argai is much as it was in Xer's time: a chilly rock with little to see except scattered ruins and the blaze of the Ihala Spiral (now known as the Indrexu) in its night skies. The Argaians have been renowned (and cursed) since the first days of the Tion as hard-bitten traders and daring pilots with a habit of turning to piracy when it suits them. Xer -- generally said to have been born around 25,200 BBY -- was a pirate chieftain whose fleets explored the Ihala's churning gases and dust clouds, carving out boltholes and secret routes. From these hiding places, they harried shipping in the backwater regions of the Kingdom of Cron and raided worlds as far from home as Rudrig and Caluula. In this age before reliable navicomputers, ships plying the Ihala Route jumped through hyperspace between navigational beacons, with only the most daring pilots straying beyond this "lighthouse network." Xer's raiders used a wealth of navigational data to await ships in the interstellar dark between systems. The pirates liked to litter the spacelanes with chunks of ice that would trigger ships' collision-avoidance systems, dropping them into realspace; these hazards could later be melted with a fusillade of laser blasts.

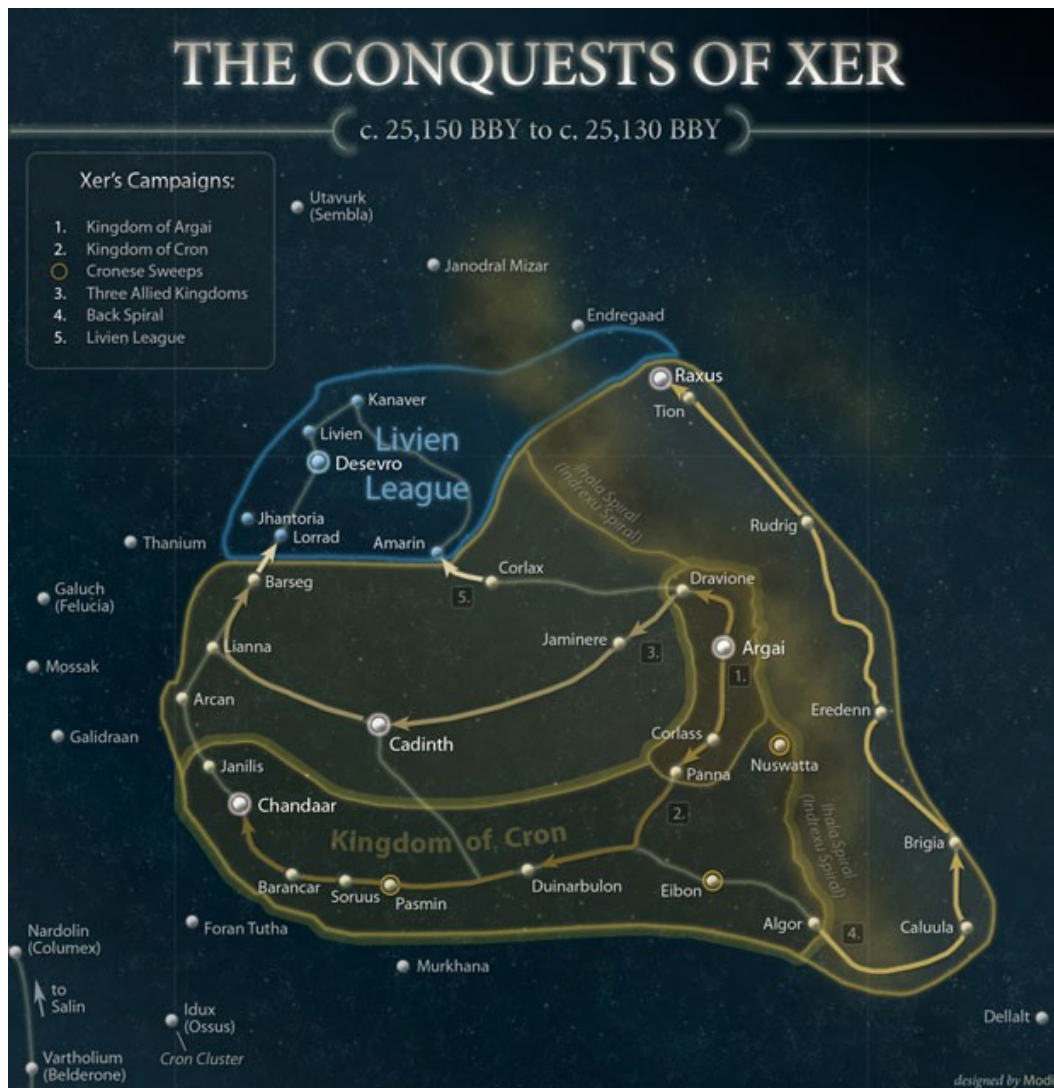
Made rich by plunder, Xer's ambitions expanded accordingly. Already hailed the lord of Argai, he seized Dravione to create his own pocket realm. Argai was nominally part of the Kingdom of Cron, then centered around an arc of worlds from Janilis to Algor, but Cron was convulsed by its own intrigues, and the court on Chandaar paid little attention to Xer's growing power. Emboldened, he moved his forces down the Ihala Route, dismantling satrapies ruled by feckless Cronese younger sons and faded families founded by long-dead warlords. Within a decade the Kingdom of Argai extended from Dravione to Panna, and Xer could no longer be ignored.

The King of Cron, Ferece, summoned Xer to Chandaar, where he sought to buy off the pirate-lord with more noble titles in return for an oath of fealty. Legend has it Xer glowered at the slump-shouldered Ferece and his simpering, vain cliques of courtiers and said that he would return in a month with a tribute suitable for what he had found on Chandaar. He gathered a sizable fleet at Panna, smashed a Cronese battlegroup at Duinarbulon, and stormed the Cronese capital. After Ferece and his closest retainers fled, Xer was declared the new King of Cron. Surveying the terrified court, he vowed the stars themselves would tremble at his name.

First to tremble, though, were the Cronese. It is said that Xer sent warlords and nobles he considered of possible worth into battle against rebellious Cronese worlds and independent planets on the kingdom's borders, taking their heirs hostage as guarantees of loyalty. Those he dismissed as useless were annihilated along with their families and followers. The most-feared warlord of the Cronese Sweeps wasn't Xer, however -- it was his teenage son, Xim. Xim's legions left none alive in the Timber Palace of Pasmin, set the royal barges of Eibon adrift in the heart of the Spiral, and razed the High Fane of Xo on Nuswatta, converting the theocracy to Xer's service via the business end of a beam-tube.

The Cronese Sweeps created a united, expansionist Kingdom of Cron boasting a battle-tested starfleet. Xer soon turned his attention beyond Cron's borders. He stormed Cadinth, Jaminere and Barseg, a trio of allied kingdoms on his rimward flank, and then moved against the worlds of the so-called Back Spiral, winning victories at Caluula, Brigia and Tion and building gleaming palaces on Raxus. Only one power managed to stand against the Pirate King: the Livien League, a confederation of worlds led by Livien, Desevro and Kanaver. The Livians defeated Cronese fleets at Amarin and then again at Lorrard.

The twin defeats infuriated Xer, but he took their lesson to heart, concluding that he had overextended himself. He retreated from the League's borders and spent the remainder of his rule forging Cron into an empire, extending its network of navigational beacons along the Back Spiral and the Cadinth Run and creating a bureaucracy equally efficient at war and commerce. But Xer made clear that his ambitions had been deferred, not denied. He organized Cron into three provinces ruled from Chandaar, Raxus Prime and Cadinth, but court rituals referred to the Four Thrones of Cron: those three worlds and the still-independent Desevro.



The Despot Triumphant

Taking the Chandaar Throne upon Xer's retirement, Xim immediately sent his forces to Jhantoria, where they smashed the Livien League. He moved to raze Desevro, but was dissuaded by the planet's military ruler, Maslovar Tiatiov. Desevran history says Tiatiov took Xim on a tour of Desevro's fighting academies and government halls, showing the new Cronese king a bureaucracy even more able than his own. And Xim was impressed by the Desevrans' tradition of training the sons of outlying worlds as janissaries and civil servants. Instead of making an example of Desevro for daring to oppose his father, Xim decided the Fourth Throne would drive territorial conquests that would make his father's ambitions seem small. With the Four Thrones under one crown, the Kingdom of Cron became the Empire of Xim.

It was the beginning of Xim's Expansionist Period, a decade-long effort that was simultaneously an enlightened program of colonization and imperial integration and a terrifying rampage. A civilization that had something to interest the Emperor could hope for the former; one that dared oppose him, or seemed unlikely to swell his coffers, could only await the latter.

Xim's legions first moved spinward, conquering worlds, building new beacons for the empire's navigational network and awaiting a wave of Tionese colonists. In this fashion the empire gobbled up vast tracts of space. "Worthy" species such as the Vurk and Stenax were enslaved; others were exterminated and their names erased from history. Where Xim's forces found empty worlds (or emptied them), Tionese colonists moved in, their numbers steadily increasing as part of Xim's strategy of conquest. The Thanium Worlds, which took their name from a military headquarters established early in Xim's spinward push, became the largest and richest of Xim's new provinces.

In the rimward reaches of the Thanium, Xim met a fierce challenge at Ranroon, whose queen's forces fought his invading janissaries bravely, bitterly and ultimately vainly. No character in *The Despotica* -- not even Xim himself -- is as vivid as Indrexu, the legendary Queen of Ranroon, and no historical figure is more argued about. Some scholars contend she is a literary invention of later dramatists; others believe she existed, but argue about her role in Xim's empire and her ultimate fate. To some she is a minor figure, a fixture at Xim's court whose name has endured; to others she is the pivot around which the empire turned, her merest glance the spark that lit the fires of the Cronese Wars, Xim's expansion and everything thereafter. Whatever the truth, the Ihala Spiral was renamed in her honor, and the Far Indrexu became the sixth province of Xim's empire, with Yutusk the Sixth throne. At the edge of the Thanium Worlds lay the new worlds of what later generations would call the Gordian Reach. And beyond those stars lay nothing -- a void marked by a mere sprinkling of systems with mostly barren worlds.

The Lost Thrones of Xim

But no matter: Xim ruled a vast expanse of space, with hundreds of thousands of worlds filling his coffers. Shipyards and factories on Jaminere, Cadinth and Thanium turned out hulking warships clad in kiirium, massive beam-tubes for ground assaults and legions of lethal war droids. Other worlds crafted merchant ships and beacons, and Tionese artisans sought to outdo each other: Xim expanded or built vast palaces on Raxus, Amarin and Argai, and a royal retreat at Nuswatta, with its famous Gardens. For all but Xim's court, gazing upon the Gardens was a death sentence: According to legend they were tended by a cadre of slaves blinded at birth, and their soil enriched by the blood of traitors, failed military officers and vanquished adversaries. To glimpse the Forbidden Gardens was to know one's doom was at hand.

Xim's forces were also pushing beyond the Indrexu Spiral. There, it's recorded, they found systems settled by humans in ages before the rise of Cron and its rival Tion states. Xim's forces quickly expanded into these worlds as well; they were dubbed the Kiirium Reaches, and the lush planets Huronom and Astigone became the Seventh and Eighth Thrones of the empire.

For millennia the location of the Kiirium Reaches was the subject of much debate among scholars, for no systems with Xim-era names were known, and the surviving chronicles from Xim's time were written for people who knew perfectly well where the Reaches were. Suspicions focused on the Salin Corridor: Columex and Trogan were popular picks for ancient Huronom, and numerous luxury resorts on Centares bear the name Astigone. (Farther afield, the likes of Jabiim, Lucazec and even Lantillies were proposed as Lost Thrones.)

Ancient Tionese chronicles did reveal this much: In the Reaches Xim's forces encountered something surprising: Sakiyan and Nimbanel traders who served another civilization -- that of the sluglike Hutts. Xim was curious about these great gastropods. Here was a civilization he couldn't simply crush -- by all accounts the Hutts were many, powerful and ruthless. Could they coexist? Or would war prove inevitable?

Xim prepared for both. He poured riches into the Kiirium Reaches, extending the beacon network that provided safe passage for both warships and trade vessels. He sent traders and scouts on to strange stars never visited by the Tionese, then had his feared GenoHeradan interrogate them about what they found. And legend has it he himself explored strange stars, ranging as far as distant Pelgrin, whose legendary Oracle he supposedly visited.

War with the Hutts

Xim's scouts not only found many wonders but also gave the Despot a portrait of the Hutts' possessions. One of the outlying Hutt worlds was lush Ko Vari, a boomworld not far from Xim's borders. Hutt trade routes led from there back to a tangle of satrapies in which the Hutts and their vassals schemed and intrigued. Beyond these worlds lay Sleheyron, a treasure world that marked the boundaries of the Hutts' true dominion, and into which only the most trusted slaves were allowed.

Xim didn't decide on war at once -- in fact, negotiations between his courtiers and the Hutts' vassals led to an embassy on Ko Vari, attended by two dozen Hutt nobles. Tionese records say Xim sent his most-trusted counselor, whose name is remembered by the Hutts as Oziaf the Insignificant, and whose presence seems to have been regarded as a grievous insult. But the Hutts could not ignore Xim's accomplishments, and so they offered him and the Tionese the chance to be particularly favored slaves. That smacked of the Cronese treatment of his father, and Xim remembered well what Xer's response had been. Determined to burn the Hutts' worlds, he returned to Chandaar and claimed the title Daritha -- Ruler of Worlds -- in a lavish ceremony.

His beacon network pushed endlessly onward down the spacelane called the Warriors' Trace, its fortresses established along a line paralleling the Hutts' worlds. Finally, Xim's forces reached far enough to flank Sleheyron. In the 25th year of his rule, Xim launched a two-pronged strike at Sleheyron and Ko Vari.

Hutt legends hold that the sack of Ko Vari was singularly brutal; both Hutt and Tionese accounts admit that Xim's drive toward Sleheyron failed: The Despot's warships were driven back to Xo's Eye (later known as Kessel), where many were lost in a nest of black holes. But despite this victory, the Hutts realized they had badly underestimated this new species and its leader -- the Tionese controlled many worlds, bred like vermin, and turned out new warships with frightening speed.

The Hutts stalled for time, defending Sleheyron and paying privateers of all species to harass Xim's borders. And the leader of the Hutts, Kossak, manipulated the Daritha rather ably, demanding to know what kind of leader hid behind sheer numbers, instead of proving his bravery in ritual combat.

After repeated taunts, Xim accepted the Hutt lord's invitation to fight at Vontor -- a site long used for Hutt ritual combats, and a rich source of increasingly scarce kiirium.

As with all of Xim's deeds, accounts of the clashes at Vontor greatly depending on who tells the tale. Scholars of the First Battle of Vontor agree on this much: Combat was joined around 25,100 BBY, and Xim's pilots were outmaneuvered by the Hutts and their slave species. Xim had lost, and by way of penalty was required to withdraw his forces from all worlds claimed by the Hutts. To Xim, this meant nothing -- how could the Hutts claim a world they didn't physically possess? He rebuilt his forces, certain that his defeat was but a temporary setback, akin to the brief resistance of the Livien League. So certain was he of victory that he dubbed Sleheyron the Ninth Throne, drew up plans for how the Hutt territories would be divided into provinces, and sent newly built warships into the Si'klaata Cluster to raid Kintan, Klatooine and Vodran.

A year later Kossak challenged him to a second ritual combat. To his shock, Xim lost this confrontation as well, though the battle cost Kossak dearly. Xim's warlords warned him that Hutt raiders were loose in the Kiirium Reaches, and suggested that it would be best for the Daritha to relinquish his dreams of conquest and fortify the vast empire he'd won so ably.

Xim regarded this as tantamount to treason, and those who offered such advice found themselves on a final journey to Nuswatta. He bought time by offering a concession -- he withdrew the Tionese from Moralan, a Hutt system whose native species had successfully rebelled, with Tionese encouragement, against their masters. (Moralan was prompted overrun by the Hutts and sterilized.) But he refused to surrender Ko Vari, which the Tionese had made their own, and all but emptied his treasuries building new warships and droid armies.

The Hutts, however, had also built up their forces. Boonta the Hutt, who'd led the extermination of Moralan, retook Ko Vari. With the Hutts and Xim on the brink of total war, Kossak proposed a third ritual combat. Win, and Xim could have Ko Vari and what was left of Moralan. Lose, and he would renounce all claim to the Kiirium Reaches.

Xim agreed; by then no advisor remained who dared to dissuade him. The Daritha and his fiercest janissaries, backed by legions of new war droids, descended from the orbital fortresses he'd brought to Vontor so that his court could witness his triumph. But the Hutts countered with numberless Nikto, Vodran and Klatooinian warriors bound to servitude by a new treaty. Xim sent his warships into the fray, but to no avail: His war droids were pulled down and dismantled by wave after wave of spice-maddened Klatooinian berserkers, his orbital fortresses were bombarded and his ships were decimated. (And, some scholars argue, he was betrayed by his own commanders.) Xim was not just defeated but captured, and paraded in chains through Hutt Space. Scholars disagree on both the date and manner of his death; some say he died at Vontor, others that he was taken to Varl and blinded, and died a slave in Kossak's dungeons.

The Devouring

A number of seemingly disparate Tionese religious and cultural traditions include a winter holiday that include the veneration of symbols of Xim, offerings to propitiate demons, and displays of repentance. These holidays are marked in any number of ways, from solemn to seemingly playful. On the windswept moors of Stalimur, pious males light candles and spend the night in silent confession at shrines built for the occasion, atoning for the sins of the previous year; in the slums of Barseg, children dress as evil spirits and are visited by their neighbors, who offer sweets in return for a year's blessing. The Barsegi call their holiday Wakemeet, but the Stalimurans and others give the night of atonement a far more chilling name: the Devouring.

For millennia scholars have agreed this holiday must recall a real event -- but what event? Most considered it a Nuswattan holy day subverted by Xim for his own purposes. Others suggested it reached back to some long-ago cataclysm that sundered the Tionese from the rest of humanity, or that it was older still -- a racial memory of servitude to the Rakata, perhaps. Revisionist scholars, meanwhile, contended it was newer -- a garbled retelling of the Tion's defeat by the young Republic.

Today the generally accepted theory is that first put forth some 30 years ago by the Corellian merchant, philosopher and historian Bleys Harand.

For eons, the star systems to trailing of the Tion Cluster have been called the Ash Worlds -- a name so widely known that the Republic adopted it for that sector of space. Few hyperspace routes wend through these lonely precincts of space, and thousands upon thousands of worlds there are barren, many still bearing the invisible scars of radiation. Astronomers have scoured the area searching for the remnants of a supernova or some other natural event, but nothing has ever been found.

Harand sent his students (including his protégé Henrietya Antilles) on secret expeditions to the Ash Worlds, then part of Wild Space. They reported that radiation levels on many of those forlorn planets fit the profile of fission attacks some 25 millennia before. The Hutts were known for carelessly poisoning worlds and for exterminating slave species, which had led most scholars to suggest that the Ash Worlds were a Hutt domain used up in eons past. Harand argued that the Ash Worlds were a remnant of the Kiirium Reaches, and the Devouring was a memory of a genocidal campaign waged by the Hutts against the Tionese.

The newborn Empire interdicted many of the Ash Worlds, using them for weapons testing and other activities best conducted far from the Core. With further explorations impossible, Harand's followers searched tirelessly for surviving records in the Tion. Antilles' discovery of the Great Duinarbulon Mausoleum (and her work to decipher the tomes inside) proving Harand correct: The Antilles Map found in the Mausoleum showed that the hostile world of Wyndigal II was once Huronom, while anonymous OHS3842-03 had been Astigone.

According to the Duinarbulon Archives and records recovered by Ruurian archaeologists on Dellalt , the victorious Hutts raided the Kiirium Reaches for slaves and regarded them as fair game for the ambitions of young Hutt princelings, but left the worlds more or less unharmed for centuries after the Daritha's death. But all that changed around 24,500 BBY, when a new branch of humanity arrived from the distant center of the galaxy. These humans skirmished with their Tionese cousins, leading the Hutts to believe they were witnessing something familiar: a clan war. If so, the defeated clan would agree to serve the victors, uniting these humans against their other potential enemies.

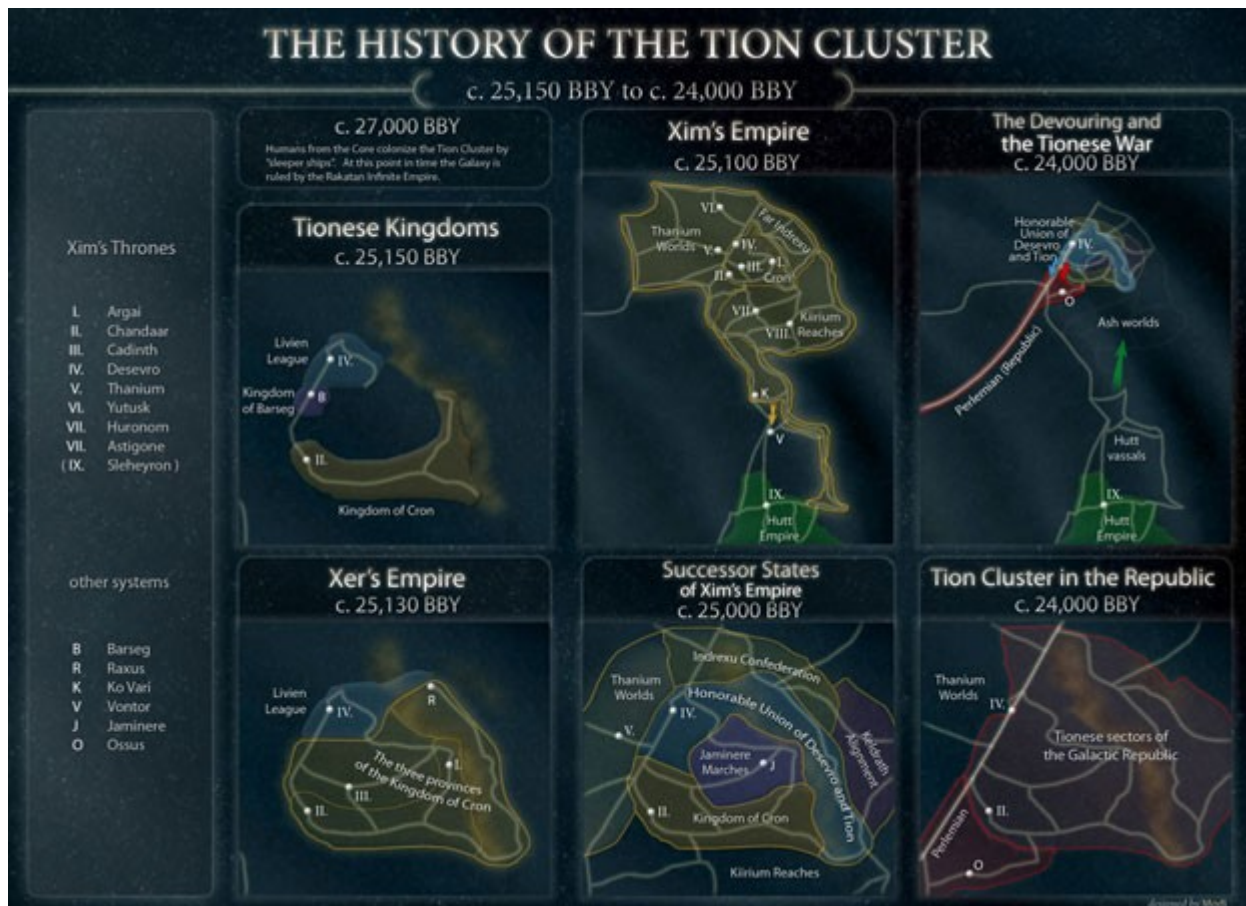
The Hutts, remembering all too well that Xim had been a fearsome opponent, moved ruthlessly to create a buffer between themselves and the Tion Cluster by invoking the terms of the Third Battle of Vontor: Within the old borders of the Kiirium Reaches they exterminated the Tionese to the last man, woman and child. Their settlements were vaporized, their worlds bombarded and poisoned, their histories and eventually even their names erased. Xim's beacons were destroyed, dismantled or towed away for the Hutts' own purposes, leaving future explorers to find new routes through the desolation. Fearing imminent ruin, the hierophants of Xo fled Nuswatta to found a new stronghold where they would await the climactic battle between humanity and the Hutts that would usher in the end of time and the Perfection of Xo. (The Tionese never heard from them again.)

Only along the Warriors' Trace were the old beacons left intact and a few Tionese worlds spared -- and that was only to preserve a Hutt invasion corridor to the Tion and make sure there were hostages to take along the way. Some of those beacons still exist today in the vicinity of what is now known as the Salin Corridor -- mute relics of a vanished empire.

The Hand of Xim

While many Tionese claim descent from the Despot, Xim is believed to have died with no legitimate heirs. After Xim's death, the center of his empire held together for nearly a century -- a testament to the strength of the institutions he and Xer had built. But by the time of the Devouring, the empire had fragmented into brawling states: the Kingdom of Cron, the Jaminere Marches, the Indrexu Confederation, the Keldrath Alignment, the Thanium Worlds and the Honorable Union of Desevro and Tion would spend centuries struggling against each other, the Core and the Hutts, until their ancient glories were little more than legends to enliven a dreary backwater.

In the Republic's final years, the Cluster's disparate states joined up to form two tattered dominions: the Tion Hegemony and the Kingdom of Cron. Both became Separatist hotbeds during the Clone Wars, and paid the price after the rise of the Empire. The Empire allowed the Hegemony a humiliatingly nominal independence, but carved out the Allied Tion, Indrexu and Keldrath into sectors, alongside the renamed Cronese Mandate and the shrunken Hegemony. Talk of reunification proceeded by fits and starts after the Empire's demise, with the New Republic seemingly showing little interest in the region. The Yuuzhan Vong raided the Cluster's border worlds, but did substantial damage only to Caluula. The Tion's time has long since passed, the name of Xim remains powerful -- an evocation of a period of galactic history at once barbaric and heroic, many of whose triumphs, horrors and mysteries are yet to be investigated.



Significant Worlds of the Tion Cluster and the Historical Greater Tion

The Cronese Mandate

The Cronese Mandate includes hundreds and hundreds of populated worlds alongside numerous uninhabited ones. The Cronese tend to aloofness, mindful of their imperial past and often dismissing their Tionese neighbors as unsophisticated peasants -- Cron has always looked to the rest of the galaxy in a way the rest of the Tion hasn't. Its principal worlds are along the Cronese Arc; the Kismaano Bypass and the Indrexu Route connect it to the Allied Tion, while some traders follow the Arc to Saheelindeel and the worlds of the Tion Hegemony's Back Spiral.

Arcan -- A busy port on the Perlemian for millennia, Arcan IV is the Cronese Mandate's principal spaceport and a fairly prosperous system with numerous mining concerns.

Janilis -- Already old in Xim's time, Janilis VII was one of the cradles of Cronese civilization, a lush planet favored by Cron's nobles. It remains populous today, but is a rundown world with a subsistence economy. The Cronese charge exorbitant rates to researchers who want to poke through its archives in search of lost documents from Xim's era.

Chandaar -- The capital of the Cronese Mandate, Chandaar was the original throneworld of Cron and the second of the Xim Thrones. It remains the royal seat of Cron, now ruled by figureheads. Today Chandaar is a polluted, decaying urban world, home to many Cronese mining companies. Its surface is dotted with soulless modern cityscapes and ancient ruins attesting to its ancient glories.

Oor -- In ancient times Oor VII was a humming factory world, but millennia of environmental degradation have left it parched and thinly populated.

Barancar -- Originally a thriving merchant port, Barancar was ringed with orbital shipyards in Xim's day. Millennia of war and decay have left most of the yards derelict, but fitful industry still struggles along here and there. Many of the ancient docks are now the lairs of smugglers and outlaws.



Soruus -- During Xim's reign Soruus was a booming tradeworld famous for gladiatorial spectacles, a tradition that has continued to thrive even as most other commerce has ebbed.

Pasmin -- A tradeworld in Xim's time, Pasmin remains known for its skilled weavers, who labor at their craft much as their distant ancestors did.

Arramanx -- A lawless urban world, Arramanx's slums are notorious throughout the Tion. Law-abiding star-hoppers from the Allied Tion do their business at a number of scuzzy but serviceable orbital stations, while those carrying illegal cargoes try their luck planetside.

Duinarbulon -- One of the eldest Cronese worlds, Duinarbulon's proud warriors served Xer and Xim as avidly as they had the Cron lords. The mightiest Duin aspired to become Duinarbulon Lancers, who served Xim on countless worlds before their defeat at the Second Battle of Vontor. Legend has it that seven massive stones of polished ebon, now long-vanished, marked the Lancers' parade grounds. Duinarbulon is a pastoral world relatively unscathed by the Cluster's long history of unrest.

Derellium -- A leading agricultural world of the Tion, Derellium is famous locally for its wines. Some Cronese wine collections include centuries-old Derellium vintages.

Eibon -- One of Cron's eldest and most-powerful worlds, Eibon has been known for millennia for its proud, independent people, whom even Xer and Xim treated with respect. The Eibon Scimitar, one of Xim's flagships, was destroyed at the First Battle of Vontor.

Algor -- Algorians are famed for their disputatiousness, which is the subject of many a joke in the Cluster, and their ferocity as pirates. Many early tales of Xim and Xer celebrate their victories over Algorian raiders, though such tales are less popular on grimy, urban Algor.

Foran Tutha -- A barren world on the edge of the Tion Cluster, Foran Tutha would be just another anonymous rock if not for the discovery of the Foran Tutha star probe. Scholars have argued for five centuries whether the fragments of this unimaginably ancient starship are remnants of Celestial, Rakatan or early Core technology; they seem certain to argue for five centuries more.

Kismaano -- A rich mining world on the Kismaano Bypass, Kismaano has long stood apart from the rest of Cron, which has never trusted its canny merchants. Kismaano's surface is swept by high winds, and its eldest settlements were built in the sides of canyons and rifts. These cliffside dwellings have been tourist attractions for millennia.

Gadon -- A mining world, Gadon has long chafed at the domination of its powerful neighbor Kismaano.

Panna -- The Panna system is a tangle of asteroid belts surrounding a trio of gas giants, home to bold prospectors, hardscrabble traders, pirates and outlaws. Its best-known settlement is Panna City, a battered spaceport on Panna Prime, a moon notable for its thick, gelid seas.

Corlass -- As with the other Cronese systems huddled against the Indrexu Spiral, Corlass has a long history of piracy, interrupted by periods of sullen lawfulness compelled by strong Cronese governments. Xim admired the Corlassi for their bravery and skill as spacers, and former Corlassi buccaneers captained many of his warships.

Argai -- The homeworld of Xer and Xim, Argai was the site of the Despot's grandest palace, now little more than scattered stones rounded by the eons.

Nuswatta -- The last grisly sacrifices were performed unimaginably long ago, and the hierophants of Xo are long gone, but Nuswatta remains an object of curiosity to a galaxy raised on tales of the ghastly doings here. In theory only Cronese may visit Nuswatta and view the ruins of its fabled Gardens, though in practice most humans can bribe their way onto the planet. Nonhumans face considerable danger trying to travel there, however, as nearly all Cronese (and many Tionese) consider aliens' presence on Nuswatta taboo.

The Allied Tion

The Allied Tion has little historical identity, having been carved out of the Tion Hegemony by the Empire. Traditionally, this area was a buffer between the Hegemony and Cron, with Lianna, Barseg, Cadinth and Jaminere jostling for influence. Today the Allied Tion is known for its manufacturing and trade. The Cadinth Run sees a great deal of traffic, though little of that passes beyond Jaminere to the Indrexu Route and the Desevran Trace.

Lianna -- One of the busiest ports in the Tion Cluster, Lianna is the headquarters of Santhe/Sienar Technologies. Lianna prides itself on its independence and power, but such airs arouse snickers among many Tionese. The questionable Liannan claim never to have been ruled by Xim is much mocked, as during the Despot's reign Lianna was a bleak agricultural world with a few thousand inhabitants.

Barseg -- Perhaps the most arrogant of all Tionese, the Barsegi regard their neighbors with ill-concealed contempt, loftily informing any who ask (and many who don't) that Barseg was an interstellar power before the Chandaarians even reached the stars. Barseg's castes are ancient and stunningly rigid, with many on the grim tradeworld performing the same duties their distant ancestors did.

Lorrad -- This grimy urban world was enslaved by Barseg for millennia, with many Lorradians living in harrowing conditions. The planet has been free of its neighbor since the Republic brought Barseg to heel around 300 BBY, but its economic servitude remains much the same.

Spinax -- Spinax occupies a romantic place in the Tion, famous for its long tradition of leviathan-hunters. For ages these hunters took to the sea in flimsy vessels to hunt giant crustaceans with a dim, malevolent intelligence and tough, flexible skeletons useful for a range of crafts. Careless undersea mining has long polluted Spinax's seas, however, and the last leviathans died centuries ago.

Cadinth -- A world of black sands and howling winds, Cadinth has long been known for its mineral wealth and as the site of numerous battles, sitting as it does at the center of the Tion Cluster.

Renowned as the Third Throne of Xim, it is dotted with gloomy, sharp-featured cities that self-consciously evoke the distant past.

Embaril -- One of the Tion's least-spoiled worlds, Embaril's green hills and crystalline lakes attract wealthy nobles from throughout the Cluster and even some parts beyond.

Voss -- The Empire poured credits into this unremarkable mining world when it created the Allied Tion. Imperial hopes of creating an industrial powerhouse to balance the influence of Lianna soon faded, however, as Voss quickly fell under the sway of corrupt Tionese clans.

Jaminere -- The capital of the Allied Tion, Jaminere is a powerful manufacturing world admired for its rather un-Tionese efficiency. In the centuries after Xim's death Jaminere's rule stretched from Embaril and Desargorr to Amarin and Argai, and its influence remains strong in the sector.

Dravione -- Long ago supplanted by Jaminere, Dravione is a bleak agricultural world notable for a handful of Xim-era aeries that are remarkably well-preserved by the thin air.

Corlax -- An unremarkable industrial world, Corlax spent millennia changing hands between Desevro and Jaminere before becoming one of the Separatists' leading sources of war materiel during the Clone Wars.

Amarin -- One of the Tion's busiest agri-worlds, Amarin was a hunting reserve during Xim's time, and tradition has preserved its thick, cool forests ever since, offering a small respite from the wreckage of so much else in the Cluster.

Desargorr -- A mountainous world rich in minerals, Desargorr is pitted by millennia of ruthless mining, as are the system's numerous moons, asteroids and comets.

The Tion Hegemony

The Hegemony is divided into two quite different regions: the cluster of systems at the head of the Desevran Run, and the string of systems beyond the Indrexu, along the Tion Trade Route in what's known as the Back Spiral. The former rose to prominence as the Livien League; often called the Livien Worlds, they include some of humanity's eldest cultures. The Back Spiral worlds are mostly poor, and have little to do economically or culturally with the Livien Worlds.

Desevro -- This ancient, rotted city-planet has a long, bitter history: It began as the leading world of the Livien League, provided Xim's empire with military discipline and flawless organization as his Fourth Throne, and then led the Honorable Union of Desevro and Tion into war against the young Republic. But it became a backwater ages ago, and now is steeped in millennia of bitterness.

Livien -- The founding world of the ancient Livien League, Livien now barely even has its lost glories to sustain it, having stumbled into a long twilight as a subsistence agricultural world pocked with ruins.

Kanaver -- An ancient Livien world, Kanaver has shaken off centuries of torpor to re-engage with the galaxy, becoming a busy port serving the rimward systems of the Perlemian, the Hegemony worlds of the Back Spiral, and the planets of the Mon Cal-dominated trade route known as the Overic Griplink.

Folende -- A middling agri-world for centuries, Folende upped its production substantially in the final decades of the Republic under mysterious circumstances, becoming a provider of staples to the impoverished worlds of the Far Perlemian.

Omman -- An agricultural competitor of Folende's, Omman became an Imperial garrison after the fall of the Republic, with the Empire using the planet as a base from which it could keep an eye on the Mon Calamari and Rebel rumblings in the restive Back Spiral.

Abraxin -- A misty world tucked into a fold in the Indrexu Spiral, Abraxin has long had a dubious reputation among the Tionese, who as children hear spooky stories of the planet's marsh haunts and then grow up to find Abraxin's soothsayers and poets are witchy, too. The planet is known for spirits of the liquid variety as well.

Raxus -- In Xer's time Raxus was dubbed the Circlet of the Tion, its shorelines crowned with marble palaces and the floors of its warm lagoons decorated with colorful tiles. It enjoyed a renaissance around 14,300 BBY as the central world of the realm known as Nikato's Bootheel, with the Machinists of Nikato making its earlier adornments seem paltry. But in later millennia Raxus became a dank hell

of industrial filth, a birthplace of foul weapons and dark plots that proved attractive to numerous enemies of the Republic, from the Sith to the Separatists.

Tion -- The world that gives the Cluster its name is actually one of its minor planets, a placid waterworld circling a pair of brilliant cyan stars at a distance (and visible far beyond the Cluster's borders). Tion's trio of moons house industrial operations and an unexceptional spaceport.

Argoon -- A motley manufacturing world, Argoon is typical of the Back Spiral in having long looked to the more-prosperous worlds of the Keldrath and Pakuuni sectors rather than to the Livien Worlds.

Rudrig -- This lush planet has long been the home of the University of Rudrig, which draws promising students from worlds as distant as Arda and Centares. While some of its departments are lazy and reactionary, others offer a rare chance to consider the future without being oppressed by the Tion's past.

Clariv -- A busy shipyard, Clariv conducts much of its business for Keldrath and Pakuuni interests. It was the target of brutal Imperial subjugation shortly before the Battle of Yavin for what were (correctly) perceived as Rebel sympathies. Eredenn -- Eredenn IV is a frozen world that turns lush and green during its brief summers. It was the site of fierce fighting during the Clone Wars.

Kaon -- This hard-to-reach, little-remarked Back Spiral world became a secret base during the Clone Wars, and was rumored to be a headquarters for Count Dooku.

Stalimur -- This stormy world is known for the surliness of its dour farmers and the viciousness of its pirates, who have haunted the system's tumbling asteroid belts for eons.

Orion -- Orion IV is a run-of-the-mill manufacturing world that tipped into near-open rebellion shortly before the Battle of Yavin and was crushed by the Empire.

Brigia -- A restive world economically dominated by the Pakuuni, Brigia was watched carefully by the Empire during its crackdown on the Back Spiral. It was invaded by the Yuuzhan Vong and Vongformed, but much of the ecological changes seemed to retreat within the next decade, leading scientists to fear the bioweapon Alpha Red had somehow been introduced from neighboring Caluula. Scientists have monitored the planet carefully since then.

Caluula -- Depopulated by the Vong, this lush world was where Alpha Red was illegally and recklessly field-testing. The bioweapon slew the Vong and their creations, but then mutated and began taking a toll on native species. A quarantine of the planet failed in the chaos after the Vong War, but those leaving the planet are subject to thorough decontamination procedures.

Saheelindeel -- This rural world is the home of the Saheelindeeli, a furred bipedal species employed throughout in the Cluster as low-wage workers. They are simultaneously valued for their industriousness and disliked for their sly ways.

Dellalt -- This unremarkable world was once a key military holding of Xim's, housing the Despot's legendary treasure vaults. For millennia the vaults were thought to be empty, but shortly before the Battle of Yavin, the true treasure vaults were discovered beneath the vacant chambers. The war materiel and records found inside were no longer of military use, but have drawn archaeologists ever since.

Indrexu Sector

The worlds of the Far Perlemian were of little interest to the Republic during its final years, and slavers, pirates and Separatists often had free reign there. The Indrexu sector -- a name that recalled the Indrexu Confederation which held sway here eons ago -- was carved out of the Hegemony in an effort to keep the restive Indrexu worlds from making common cause with their Livien neighbors.

Ank Ki'Shor -- A manufacturing world willing to do business with most anybody, Ank Ki'Shor became a key supplier to the Rebel Alliance in its formative years -- and was the site of an early Rebel show of force when Y-wings defended its population against Imperial bombardment.

Janodral Mizar -- This riotous trade world has long burst at the seams with scouts, freebooters and starhoppers. Mizarians have little patience for their gloomy Tionese kin, and reflexively lash out at anybody who tries to impose order on them.

Estaria -- This spaceport is a crossroads for traffic going between the Far Perlemian and the Tion, and is only moderately corrupt by Tionese standards.

Endregaad -- A backwater even for the Back Spiral, Endregaad is a nearly-forgotten world with a subsistence economy.

Keldrath Sector

This sector was also carved out of the Hegemony in an effort to create a buffer, in this case between the Pakuuni domination of their sector and the Tionese. The effort was ill-researched and backfired -- that part of the Hegemony had always gravitated to Pakuuni anyway, and the new sector immediately fell under its neighbor's sway.

Gbu -- A high-gravity world, Gbu is home to the Veubgri, an insect species prized as valuable laborers able to work in highly pressurized atmospheres.

Mullan -- History seems to have skipped Mullan, which has long been known for its placid people and steady flow of good, simple wines and hearty foodstuffs.

The Thanium Worlds

These far-flung worlds were remade by Xim's forces during the Expansionist Period and formed the industrial engine of his empire. They once stretched to the edges of the Radama Void, including worlds later known as part of the Sith Empire and the Gordian Reach. The rimward portions of the Thanium Worlds were known in Xim's time as the Far Indrexu. While the Thanium Worlds survive as the name of a modern sector, the eons have remade these planets so utterly that they bear few traces of Xim's rule.

Thanium -- Once an industrial world synonymous with military might and capable of striking fear in Xim's enemies, the Fifth Throne remains a commercial world -- but one distinguishable from its neighbors only because of its name.

Yutusk -- The Sixth Throne is now a quiet world in the Mortex sector known primarily for its farms, with its ancient fame likely to elicit wry shrugs from locals.

Ranroon -- Ranroon, at least, retains some of the feel of the rancorous, matriarchal world that bitterly opposed Xim's forces. It's a world of dizzying peaks and clifftop aeries, where ancient traditions are proudly held and outsiders regarded with deep suspicion.

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